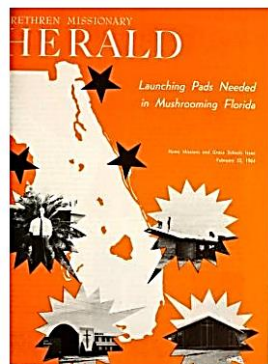


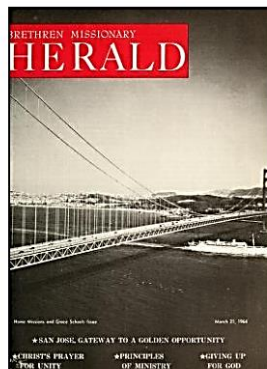
Dr. John C. Whitcomb



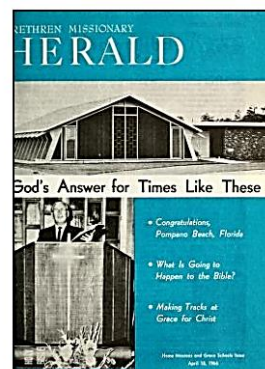
A Series of Three 1964 Articles from the *Brethren Missionary Herald* on Today's Evangelicalism and the Ecumenical Movement, Genuine Biblical Unity vs. False Carnal Unity, and the Scriptural Relationship Between Love and Truth



2/22/64



3/21/64



4/18/64

- I. The Evangelical Movement Today (2/22/64)**
- II. Christ's Prayer for Unity (3/21/64)**
- III. Speaking the Truth in Love (4/18/64)**

THE ATTENTION of professing Christians throughout the world seems to be focused more and more upon the problems and possibilities of organizational church union. In fact, the mid-twentieth century may well be described as *the era of ecumenism* in the history of the church. On every side, and through every available means of religious communication, we are being told of the scandal of disunity and denominationalism in the visible church of Christ, and of the urgency of merging all segments of the professing Christian church into one organization in order that the unbelieving world might be more effectively reached with the Christian message and that Christ's prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17:21) might be fulfilled at last.

Church Mergers and the World Council

In their zeal to accomplish this ecumenical goal, denominational groups of *similar background and practices* are entering into large mergers. In 1961, the Northern Presbyterians and the United Presbyterians joined ranks to form the United Presbyterian Church in the USA with a membership of 3,259,000. In 1962, four Lutheran groups merged to form the Lutheran Church in America with 3,200,000 members.

In addition to this, and in spite of *great differences of background and practice*, the Congregational and Christian Church merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ with 2,300,000 members. More recently, it has been seriously proposed that all Episcopalians, United Presbyterians, Methodists, and the United Church of Christ should merge to form a Protestant super-denomination with a membership of nearly *nineteen million* people.

On the international level, the ecumenical movement made sweeping new gains at a conference held in New Delhi, India, in November 1961. Here, at its third assembly, the World Council of Churches accepted into its membership the *fifty million* members of the spiritually dead, anti-Reformation, and legalistic Greek Orthodox Church, Rus-

sian Orthodox Church, and related churches in Poland, Bulgaria, and Rumania. Many believe that the Council would have gladly received the Roman Catholic Church into its membership as well, even if the latter had refused to make any concessions in matters of doctrine and government.

The significance of all this should be clear to Bible-believing Christians. The Bible speaks repeatedly of the coming great apostasy, and of the great ecclesiastical system which will emerge following the Rapture of the true church, and which will be used by the Antichrist in his rapid rise to world dominion (I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 3:1; II Thess. 2:3ff.; II Pet. 3:3; Jude 18; Rev. 17). In the very nature of the case, the ecumenical movement prepares the way for the ultimate apostasy, for it de-emphasizes the importance of doctrine and of the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ alone. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the five presidents of the W.C.C., stated: "Heaven is also not a place to which we humans go in our present bodily state, nor is it a place for Christians only. Those who have led a good life on earth, but have found themselves unable to believe in God, will not be debarred from heaven. I expect to meet some present-day atheists there" (*London Daily Mail*, Oct. 21, 1961). Another W.C.C. leader, D. T. Niles, in speaking of the church's responsibility toward Hindus, concludes: "The task of evangelism is to bring out Jesus Christ in every man, not to put Him in" (*Christianity Today*, May 25, 1962, p. 29).

Ecumenical Trends Among Evangelicals

Parallel with the larger and liberal ecumenical movement which we have just considered is an ecumenical movement among evangelical Christians, which has already gained widespread attention and has made significant strides. While it is difficult to discern all the distinctive elements of this new trend, at least the following characteristics may be noted: (1) We are being told that the most effective way to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world in our generation

is to unite all born-again Christians both doctrinally and organizationally, for the world will simply remain unimpressed by the message of a divided church. (2) Since a united front before the world is of supreme importance, we are being told that it is basically sinful to form new denominations, or fellowships, of Christians for the purpose of perpetuating distinctive doctrines or ordinances. Since Christ is not divided, and we shall some day be in heaven together, it is sinful to separate ourselves from *any* Christian over *any* doctrinal, or ecclesiastical, issue. The mark of true orthodoxy, we are told, is *love, not doctrine*. (3) Evangelical ecumenists recognize, however, that denominations *do* exist today and will doubtless continue to exist for a long time to come. Therefore, in order to restore at least a working unity that approaches the wonderful unity of the Early Church, we must not emphasize any doctrines that other born-again Christians do not accept. Otherwise, there might be friction and division in the body of Christ, and the world would not be impressed by our witness. To win the world for Christ, we must bury our differences and proclaim the "essential core" of the Gospel in a "positive" way. These, we believe, are some of the basic assumptions which underlie many of the statements that issue from the pens of evangelical leaders today.

In seeking to spread this philosophy among the saints, evangelical ecumenists are taking advantage of the obvious prestige and momentum of the liberal ecumenical movement by adopting some of its methods and motivations, and by setting it forth as a model for true Christians to follow. For example, Russell T. Hitt, editor of *Eternity* magazine, has criticized American evangelicals for failing to recognize that "there are solid conservative theologians and church leaders within the W.C.C. orbit." Having personally attended the sessions at New Delhi, and admitting some astonishment at the theological complexity of an organization that includes everything from Chilean Pentecostals to Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches, he concludes: "In all fairness, however,

it is obvious that any group of Christians seriously seeking the mind of Christ as they meditate upon the Holy Scriptures and are dependent upon the Holy Spirit have great supernatural forces working in their behalf. In some sessions at New Delhi this was delightfully experienced." Evangelicals, therefore, who take a negative attitude toward the W.C.C. reveal "a tendency toward black and white thinking" (*Eternity*, Feb., 1962, pp. 10-11).

In contrast to this approach, however, we find that the Scriptures constantly set forth "black and white" distinctions between sin and righteousness, and between truth and error. We are exhorted to abhor that which is evil and to cleave to that which is good. We are told that no man can serve two masters. And we are told that the way that leads to life is extremely narrow, and few there be that find it. Are we fulfilling our God-given responsibilities as watchmen of the flock if we encourage an attitude of neutrality toward organizations that are almost completely dominated by those who deny the faith once for all delivered to the saints?

The W.C.C. Statement of Faith

In the light of these considerations, the following words from the pen of a contemporary evangelical leader, Arnold T. Olson, president of the Evangelical Free Church of America, with regard to the statement of faith of the W.C.C. are quite indicative of this new trend of thought: "It is a sad commentary on how far we have drifted from the Biblical pattern when we reflect that those whom the evangelicals condemn as liberal and unorthodox should get together on a statement recognizing the deity of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures as to His person and the Trinity, and should work ceaselessly to bring the denominations together while evangelicals continue fighting among themselves and creating new divisions within their small forces . . . The great need of the hour among evangelicals is a new call to unity" (*Moody Monthly*, March 1962, p. 21).

But what is the real significance of the new statement of faith of the

W.C.C.? The original statement read as follows: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." It was at the insistence of the Greek Orthodox Church that the following words were added to this statement of faith: "according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Wonderful though these words may sound to an evangelical, they are specifically designed to deceive the simple, for the W.C.C. has officially stated, for the benefit of the more liberal denominations within its membership, that it "does not concern itself with the manner in which the churches interpret these truths" (cited by H. J. Kuiper, *Torch and Trumpet*, April 1962, p. 11). In other words, as a bulwark against heresy, it is of no more value than the paper it is written on.

Now it is a well-known fact that some of the most liberal denominations in America have excellent creeds and doctrinal statements which have been inherited from earlier and better days. The Episcopal Bishop, James A. Pike, an ecumenical leader in America, clearly reveals in the following statement his own attitude toward such orthodox creeds: "The Biblical evidence and the theological implications seem to be in favor of assuming that Joseph was the human father of Jesus. We certainly do not deny that 'the Holy Spirit hovered' (one translation), nor deny in the least the doctrine of the virgin birth; namely, the paradox which the myth presents so well: Jesus as part of historical process and also as divine interruption in history—a mighty act of God, indeed the Supreme Mighty Act of God . . . There are several phrases in the creed that I cannot affirm as literal prose sentences, but I can certainly sing them—as a kind of war song picturing major convictions in poetic terms" (*Christian Century*, Dec. 21, 1960, pp. 1496f). This serves as an excellent example of how a liberal, or Neo-Orthodox, theologian can give assent to high-sounding creeds without believing in their literal truth.

How this attitude toward creeds

works itself out in actual ecumenical practice may be seen in the World Council's fourth world Faith and Order Conference, held July 12-26, 1963, in Montreal, Canada. Although the delegates were unable to agree on any doctrinal formulation, Dr. Paul S. Minear, the newly-elected chairman of the Faith and Order Commission, insisted that "ecumenical reality resists imprisonment in dogmatic formulations . . . We have been united in a truth that surpasses all of the truth that we can put into words" (*Christianity Today*, August 30, 1963, p. 24). Carl F. H. Henry concludes that the Protestant position of the W.C.C. "increasingly reflects the initiative of Bultmannian existentialists" [who vigorously deny the literal truth of theological statements in the Bible], and points out that "the authority of the Bible has an increasingly tenuous role within the life of the World Council. The Montreal conference . . . denigrated Scripture and exalted tradition" (*Christianity Today*, Aug. 30, 1963, p. 25).

Instead of setting up the World Council of Churches as a model to be followed, Christian leaders should be faithfully warning their people to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15), and to recognize that "Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light" and that "his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:14-15). **February 22, 1964 ▼**

THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT TODAY

Brethren Missionary Herald

By John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Th.D.

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR UNITY

It is indeed astonishing to find the leading liberals of our day using Christ's prayer for unity in John 17 as a slogan and a battlecry of the ecumenical movement. Can one find a more striking example of twisting the Scriptures and taking verses out of context? To be sure, our Lord prayed four times that "they may be one" (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23). But for whom was He praying, and what is the nature of this oneness and unity?

A Unity of True Believers Only

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones of London has recently given us a very helpful study of our Lord's prayer in the light of the ecumenical movement (*The Basis of Christian Unity*, Eerdmans, 1963, 50 cents). He emphasizes, first of all, that the context of John 17:11 makes it perfectly clear that Christ was not praying for the unity of all men, or even of all "Christendom," but rather for those who "have kept thy word" (v. 6), for those who "knew of a truth that I came forth from thee" (v. 8), and "for them which thou hast given me" in contrast to "the world" (v. 9). Thus, our Lord's high-priestly prayer to the Father *cannot possibly refer* to such movements as the National and World Council of Churches which represent a union of believers and outspoken unbelievers (cf. II Cor. 6:14-16).

A Unity That Already Exists

In the second place, he points out that Christ did not pray that true believers should strive to achieve or create unity, but that the Father might *keep* them in His name. In other words, true believers are one in Christ *already*, even as Paul stated: "For as the body is *one*, and hath many members . . . so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into *one* body" (I Cor. 12:12-13). It is on this basis that we are exhorted by Paul to give diligence "to *keep* the unity of the Spirit

in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). It should be obvious, therefore, that no ecumenical movement can fulfill this aspect of Christ's prayer, nor can evil forces disrupt or destroy it.

A Perfect Spiritual Unity

In the third place, our Lord was *not* praying for a mere organizational, unity. He prayed to the Father "that they may be one, *as we are . . . as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee*, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:11, 21). As Dr. Lloyd-Jones observes: "Our Lord is dealing here with the mystical union which subsists between the three persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. It is the highest mystery of the Christian faith. And yet this is the term, the verse, that is being bandied about as if its meaning were obvious, and indeed as if it had but one meaning; namely, some external organizational unity. Everything about the statement indicates the exact opposite. It is concerned about a unity of essence" (p. 13).

A basic element of the perfect spiritual unity which exists between Christ and the Father is that of *truth*. Our Lord prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (v. 17). But it is highly significant that *truth* is the one element that is being sacrificed today for the sake of "unity," even among those who profess to be true believers. In our opinion, Dr. R. B. Kuiper has put his finger on the crucial point at issue when he states: "Jesus did not pray that His disciples might agree on a few doctrines and agree to disagree on many others. He did not pray for a mere minimum of doctrinal agreement, but for a maximum, even for full agreement. On that score the National Council and the World Council stand condemned . . . And, regrettably, not even the so-called evangelical councils . . . are wholly without fault in this matter. Instead of striving unremittingly for a maximum of orthodoxy [e.g.,

on such matters as Calvinism versus Arminianism; premillennialism vs. amillennialism; and believer's baptism vs. infant baptism—J.C.W.], they tend to rest satisfied with something less. . . . Instead of belittling such differences evangelicals must earnestly strive for unanimity. They must both venture to teach one another and condescend to learn from one another. To relegate such differences to the limbo of the non-essential, or to ridicule them as hair-splitting, is at complete variance with true ecumenism. To struggle without ceasing toward their resolution on the basis of God's infallible Word is a demand of Scriptural ecumenism, for thus believers may contribute to the perfecting of their unity. It was for this that Jesus prayed" ("The Unity for Which Jesus Prayed," *Torch and Trumpet*, July-August, 1962, p. 6).

True organizational unity cannot be achieved apart from true spiritual unity; and this, in turn, will not be attained until Christ himself removes every imperfection in the church at the Bema Seat (II Cor. 5:10; Eph. 5:27). In the meantime, however, it is our responsibility to labor and to pray that the fellowship of God's people be not further disrupted and broken by the growth of false doctrines and practices, and we must labor in the Holy Spirit "unto the [building] up of the body of Christ: till we all [attain unto] the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a [full-grown man], unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

Evangelicals and the Tolerance of Error

In the light of this, it is deeply discouraging to find evangelical leaders issuing eloquent and persistent warnings against preoccupation with doctrinal distinctions and theological differences. For example, in speaking of Hymenaeus and Philetus who

denied the doctrine of a literal resurrection, Dr. George Ladd of Fuller Seminary appeals to Paul's illustration of a great house containing not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth (II Tim. 2:20) to support his idea that "in the church we are to expect different kinds of ministers," and that "perfect doctrinal purity is an ideal which can never be obtained" (*Eternity*, June 1962, p. 9).

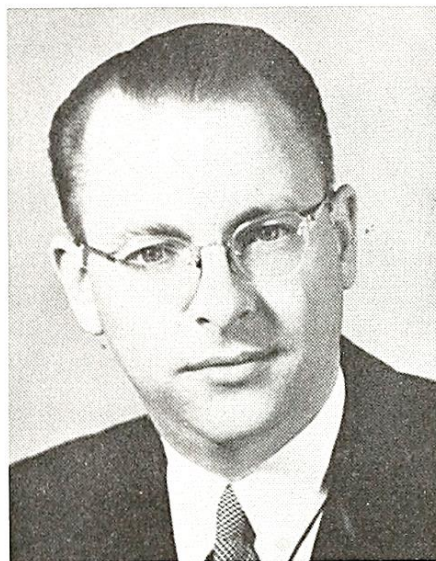
Such efforts to justify by Scripture the modern ecumenical toleration of doctrinal error must be vigorously challenged by Bible-believing Christians. A careful study of II Timothy 2 makes it clear that Paul's illustration of the "great house" has reference not to the true church, but to the professing church. The vessels of gold and of silver, which are unto honor, are true believers who will be kept by the Master forever; but the vessels of wood and of earth which are unto dishonor are false disciples who will sooner or later be discarded by Christ himself (cf. Rom. 9:22-23).

In speaking of the dishonorable vessels of wood and earth (an obvious reference to Hymenaeus and Philetus, whose word "will eat as doth a gangrene . . . and overthrow the faith of some" (vv. 17-18), Paul assures Timothy that if he "purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21). How can this be accomplished by maintaining official fellowship with such apostate ministers is not satisfactorily explained, nor can it be. In commenting on this passage, C. J. Ellicott states: "It was imperatively necessary for Timothy . . . to break off from all church fellowship, from all intimate fellowship with those above referred to under the image of wooden or earthen vessels" (*A.N.T. Commentary for English Readers*).

Dr. Ladd warns us that "if you insist on a pure church, you invite constant schism and fragmentation, until you evolve a church in which you are the sole member" (*op. cit.*, p. 7). Obviously, this is a caricature of the doctrine of separation, for no Bible-believing group of Christians has ever insisted on such a position.

There is, after all, a tremendous difference between "perfect doctrinal purity" and "essential doctrinal purity." A church or fellowship of churches which maintains *essential* doctrinal purity is one that is pure enough in doctrine to hold to the fundamentals of the faith and is pure enough in doctrine to discipline those who deny these fundamentals (John G. Balyo, letter to the editor of *Eternity*, Aug., 1962, p. 2).

The extent to which this disparagement of doctrine for the sake of unity has carried some evangelicals may be illustrated by the following statements from the pen of Dr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley of Fuller Seminary: "We make unity impossible if we in-



By John C. Whitcomb Jr., Th.D.

sist that all Christians and churches must begin by accepting the Bible, or even a particular view of the nature or constitution of the Bible, as proof of their genuine Christianity" (*The Unity and Disunity of the Church*, Eerdmans, 1958, p. 69). What, then, should be the absolute minimum of doctrinal requirement for Christian unity? In answer to this important question, Bromiley states: "To confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord is obviously essential. To accept an intricate definition of His relationship to God [such as the Nicene Creed, or even the Apostle's Creed—pp. 76-80] is not so obviously essential to saving faith, and surely ought not to be imposed as a condition of unity" (p. 79). To be sure, "the common deposit of faith, in other words, in the Apostle's Creed, is to

be accepted, but with no prescription of use or enforcement of rigid conformity" (p. 80).

Since the only valid basis of Christian unity, according to Dr. Bromiley, is the simple confession that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord, it follows naturally that ordinances, as well as creeds, must be abandoned to the extent that they stand in the way of Christian unity. Bromiley suggests two things that must be done to remove ordinances as an obstacle to ecumenism. First each denomination must recognize that the ordinances of other denominations are valid (p. 87).

In the second place, there must not only be recognition, but also definite integration. "This involves two definite stages. First, there is required the attainment of a definite structure of unity in the one locality so that all the churches, even though their sacramental practice and beliefs may vary, are congregations of the one church. . . . But, second, there is also required a patient examination of the various sacramental modes and practices and tenets, not with a view to the enforcement of a new uniformity, but for mutual assimilation and enrichment and for the softening of more glaring or harmful anomalies or discrepancies. . . . In the one church [that is, the new community superchurch], the congregations with their diverse forms of outlook and worship must be encouraged to grow together in order that *new and richer and more powerful forms* [!] may emerge under the guidance of the Word and impulsion of the Spirit . . . Thus adult baptism may still flourish alongside infant; immersion alongside affusion; liturgical and more ornate forms alongside the more simple and spontaneous; the one Spirit exercising His diverse gifts [!] in the one church according to His manifold distribution . . ." (p. 90, italics ours).

The Crucial Question

This, then, is the final goal of the new "evangelical ecumenism," and it is quite understandable why this should be so. For if outward unity is more important than essential doctrinal purity, if putting up "a solid

(Continued on page 141)

Christ's Prayer . . .

(Continued from page 139)

front" against the unbelieving world is more crucial in our day than perpetuating the doctrines and practices given to us by our Lord in the Scriptures, then we have no other choice but to submit to "the mutual *assimilation*" and "the *softening* of glaring discrepancies" of doctrines and practices as they are now held by the various church groups throughout the world that profess to acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord.

It is the writer's conviction that all

Bible-believing Christians in positions of authority have a solemn responsibility to prayerfully search the Scriptures to determine whether such an approach to ecumenism is of the Spirit or of the flesh, and whether it will lead to greater spiritual power for proclaiming the whole counsel of God to a lost world, or to a gradual collapse into doctrinal nothingness. What did our Saviour *really* mean when He prayed: "Holy Father, keep them through thine own name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, [even] as we are"? ▼

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

By John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Th.D.

(Third of Series)

April 18, 1964

It should not be surprising to find liberal preachers emphasizing love at the expense of Biblical doctrines, for liberalism can thrive only in a foggy atmosphere of subjectivism and speculation. But when evangelical leaders begin to adopt such attitudes, there is great cause for alarm in the church. In November 1958, *Eternity* published an article by Billy Graham in which he quoted John 13:34-35 and asked these questions: "What is the great overwhelming evidence that we have passed from death to life? Orthodoxy? Morality? Evangelistic passion? No! *It is love!*" The following year, Dr. Edward J. Carnell published a volume, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, in which he appealed to the same text of Scripture and reached the same conclusion: "Although Jesus plainly says, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35), orthodoxy often says, 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you defend orthodox doctrine. . . . While doctrine illuminates the plan of salvation, the mark of a true disciple is *love*, not doctrine . . . doctrine puffs up, love edifies" (p. 128). Many evangelicals seem to be impressed with such reasoning today.

Speaking in Love

Now it cannot be denied that love is of supreme importance as a Christian *virtue* (I Cor. 13:13); or that it is the best way to exercise the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:31-13:13). But to elevate Christian love above Christian doctrine is to undermine the very foundations of Christianity; for Christian love, in the true sense of the term, can thrive only in the atmosphere of Christian *truth*. The New Testament never places love above doctrine or truth, for they are in different though interdependent realms, even as God's holiness cannot be compromised or overshadowed by His love. As a Christian virtue, love is greater than faith or hope (I Cor. 13:13), but it is not greater than truth itself! Love is a fruit of the

Spirit; but truth is not even included in the list of fruits, for the Holy Spirit who produces these fruits is himself the Spirit of *truth* (John 15:26). In other words, we may say that truth is the branch from which love must come.

Liberals, as well as some evangelicals, are fond of quoting John 13:35 to show that it is love, rather than doctrine, that determines whether a man is a true disciple of Jesus Christ. But let us look carefully at these words: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Now when our Lord spoke of "all men," He was speaking of the unsaved world. And by the very nature of the case, it is impossible for the world to recognize true Christians on the basis of their doctrinal confession. Unbelievers are blind in this area (II Cor. 4:4); and to them, Christian doctrine is foolishness (I Cor. 1:23; 2:14). But the world is impressed when it sees true, Spirit-wrought love in the lives of believers. The world cannot *produce* this kind of fruit, but it possesses sufficient conscience and discernment many times to *recognize* the real thing when it sees it. Thus, for the sake of testimony to the world (among other reasons), our Lord urged His disciples to display true love for one another.

However, it is important to note that our Lord did *not* say: "By this shall ye know that ye are my disciples," for the only God-approved way for *Christians* to determine whether a man is a true believer is on the basis of his adherence to the truth of God's Word. The Apostle John wrote: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God" (I John 4:2-3). To be sure, a true believer must exhibit to some extent the fruits of the Spirit (I John 4:7); but it is his adherence to revealed *truth* that enables other Christians to recognize him as a genuine believer.

Many liberal preachers today seem to be "speaking . . . in love." But are they "speaking *the truth* in love" (Eph. 4:15)?

It is evident that John, the apostle of love, did not consider love to be the basic test for true discipleship, for he wrote: "If there come any unto you, and *bring not this doctrine*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that bideth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 10:11). Generally speaking, even the world has sufficient conscience to distinguish between a professing Christian and a professing pagan. But the world is not capable of distinguishing between true shepherds and false ones. This is why the test of love is inadequate for the protection of the flock. False shepherds today have much to say about "love," but "they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:18).

We come to the real heart of this question when we discover that a "Christian love" which ignores or denies Christian doctrine is not a genuine Christian love at all. It is a counterfeit. The Lord Jesus said: "If ye love me, *keep my commandments*. . . . He that hath my commandments and *keepeth them*, he it is that loveth me . . . If a man love me, he will *keep my words* (John 14:15, 21, 23). How, then, can a man claim to be filled with Christian love when he denies the words and commands of Christ? Such a person removes from the term "love" all connotations of obedience and loyalty, and reduces it to the level of a mere emotion.

Speaking the Truth

One does not need to search far in the New Testament to find that Christ and the apostles placed the supreme emphasis upon indoctrination of converts in "the whole counsel of God." Even the Great Commission makes this quite clear, for here we learn that the church's task

in this world includes much more than showing the world the fact that we are true disciples of our Lord by the fact that we love one another. In fact, her task involves even more than preaching the Gospel (Mark 16:15), making disciples, and baptizing them in the name of the triune Godhead (Matt. 28:19). The church's greatest task because of the time, effort, and talents required is this: "Teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).

God has seen fit to give us not only the Great Commission, but also His approved method of fulfilling it. Throughout the New Testament we see the apostles making converts, having them baptized, and organizing them into local churches for the purpose of doctrinal and practical edification and the observance of Christian ordinances. It was the joyous privilege of apostles and newborn Christians alike to proclaim the Gospel and to win the lost. But the greatest task that confronted the Early Church was that of indoctrinating, edifying, and feeding those who were already within the fold. Every book of our New Testament was written for this purpose. In fact, we may even go so far as to say that the indoctrination of converts in the whole counsel of God is the basic New Testament pattern for world evangelization. Apart from this emphasis, Christian witness would soon become shallow and ineffective.

Consider, for example, the ministry of the Apostle Paul. After having spent three months in Ephesus preaching the Gospel and winning disciples (Acts 19:8), Paul settled down to the less spectacular, but absolutely vital, ministry of follow-up. Instead of marking off Ephesus as "evangelized," and moving on to other cities, he established a "theological seminary" in the school of Tyrannus and spent two full years indoctrinating the disciples. They, in turn, taught yet others, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10). In his farewell message to the Ephesian elders, he was able to testify: "I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto

you all *the counsel of God*" (20:26-27). Does this suggest that Paul considered doctrine to be of secondary importance?

After he departed from the Ephesians, he wrote to them and encouraged them to pay careful heed to their God-given pastors and teachers that they might be "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). Even this was not enough in the way of indoctrinating these Ephesian believers, for Paul later wrote to Timothy: "I besought thee to [tarry] at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some men not to teach any other doctrine" (I Tim. 1:3). Timothy was to "let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching" (I Tim. 5:17). Apparently the Ephesian church was plagued with self-styled apostles who were not content to abide by the truth of God's Word: "If any man teach [a different doctrine], and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is [puffed up], knowing nothing . . . [corrupted in mind and bereft] of the truth" (I Tim. 6:3-5). A generation later, the Lord Jesus himself commended the Ephesian church for dealing effectively with such men (Rev. 2:2).

Paul's very last letter gives us a clear insight into his appreciation of the supreme importance of correct doctrine. After exhorting Timothy to "hold [the pattern] of sound words which thou hast heard of me" (II Tim. 1:13), he told him to commit all the things which he had heard from Paul "to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). This was a task for which he could find strength only "in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1)! In contrast to the "sound" (healthful) words of true doctrine, the word of false teachers "will eat as doth a canker . . . and overthrow the faith of some" (2:17-18). For this reason, Timothy was to continue equipping himself with the God-breathed Scrip-

ture in order that he might "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but . . . shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (4:2-4).

Speaking the Truth in Love

Truth is God's medicine for saving and curing the human soul. But love is the sugar coating that makes it easier for men to swallow. By all means, speak to men in love. But love alone cannot bring life out of death and health out of sickness in the spiritual realm. We have utterly failed unless we have spoken *the truth* in love!

This was surely Paul's inspired advice to Timothy when he told him: "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, *apt to teach*, patient, in meekness [correcting] those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to *the acknowledging of the truth*, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (II Tim. 2:24-26). The supreme goal of the true pastor, when dealing with those who are groping in error, is to *teach* them, *correct* them, and lead them to *the truth*. But the most effective way to accomplish this goal is to be gentle, forbearing, and meek. After all, such a one is ensnared by the Devil, and only God can give him repentance, or change of heart, unto the knowledge of the truth.

Love, therefore, is not superior to doctrine and truth. Rather, it is the divine lubrication that enables His truth to move more smoothly into the hearts of men. It runs interference for doctrine. It is the most excellent "way" to exercise the doctrine-saturated gifts of the Spirit which were given by God to edify the church (I Cor. 12:31). May God help us in this day when love is being exalted at the expense of doctrine, to maintain the God-given balance and follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles (Eph. 4:14-15). ▼